WHAT IS A COLEGE ESSAY?

No matter what major a student declares in college, developing writing skills is a critical part of that student’s growth and progress. Nearly every course will require at least some writing. This writing most often takes the form of the college essay (also called composition, theme, or simply paper). When we constructed paragraphs in Part 4, with topic sentences and supporting details, we were aiming for an organized result, with unity and coherence. The full- length essay must have this same objective. Making all the parts of an essay work together is, of course, a greater challenge than writing a paragraph because in an essay, a topic is developed at greater length and in greater depth.

A college essay is a piece of writing that develops a topic in ﬁ ve or more paragraphs, including an introductory paragraph that states the thesis, three or more supporting paragraphs that develop the topic, and a concluding paragraph.

KINDS OF PARAGRAPHS IN THE COMPLETE COLLEGE ESSAY 1. The introductory paragraph is the fi rst paragraph of the essay. Its purpose is to lead the reader to the thesis statement in an inviting and interesting way that will encourage the reader to continue reading.

recognizing and writing a • thesis statement writing an effective • introductory paragraph • using transitions between body paragraphs to achieve coherence writing an effective • concluding paragraph composing • titles

CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

MOVING FROM THE PARAGRAPH TO THE ESSAY To prepare you for writing fully developed college essays, your work in this chapter will focus on the essential parts of the essay form:

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2. Support paragraphs (sometimes called body paragraphs) provide evidence that the thesis is valid. An acceptable college essay must have at least three well-developed support paragraphs. (You have studied these types of support paragraphs in Part 4 of this book.) Each support paragraph should fl ow logically to the next support paragraph. This is often accomplished by the careful use of transitional expressions. 3. The concluding paragraph is the fi nal paragraph of the essay. Its purpose is to give the reader a sense that the essay has come to a satisfying conclusion. By this point, the reader should have the feeling that everything the essay needed to say has been said.

WHAT IS A THESIS STATEMENT?

A thesis statement gives the main idea of an essay.

The thesis statement of an essay tells what the writer intends to prove, defend, or explain about the topic. It may show the writer’s viewpoint toward the topic or show how the writer intends to treat the topic. We say that the thesis has a controlling idea. This most important sentence is usually placed at the end of the introductory paragraph. Sample thesis statement: All-day kindergarten programs beneﬁ t children in several important ways. Do not confuse a thesis statement with a title or a simple fact. A title is usually a phrase, not a complete sentence. Sample title: The Advantages of All-Day Kindergarten A fact is something known for certain. It can be verifi ed. A fact does not suggest a personal viewpoint. Sample fact: V ery few kindergartens in the United States offer a full day of instruction.

Read each of the following statements. If the statement is a thesis, mark TH on the blank line. If the statement is a title, mark T. If the statement is a fact, mark F.

1. In the United States, kindergarten is not compulsory.

2. Children should begin learning to read in kindergarten.

3. Putting a child into kindergarten before he or she is ready can have several unfortunate effects on that child.

4. Learning to read in kindergarten

5. In some European countries, children do not begin formal schooling until the age of seven.

Practice

F

TH

TH

T

F

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Recognizing a Thesis Statement Identify each of the following as a title (T), a thesis (TH), or a fact (F). 1. It is estimated that two hundred grizzly bears live in Yellowstone National Park.

2. The survival of grizzly bears in our country should be a top priority.

3. When bears are young cubs, there are twice as many males as females.

4. Only about 60 percent of bear cubs survive the ﬁ rst few years of life.

5. Bears, a precious natural resource

6. The average life span of a bear today is only ﬁ ve or six years.

7. The sad plight of the American grizzly bear

8. Five actions need to be taken to save the grizzly bear from extinction.

9. To save the grizzly bear, we need laws from Congress, the cooperation of hunters and campers, and an educated general public.

10. A decision to save the grizzly bear

Recognizing a Thesis Statement Identify each of the following as a title (T), a thesis (TH), or a fact (F). 1. The merchandising madness of pharmaceutical companies

2. Americans are spending approximately 10.4 billion dollars a year on the four leading antidepressants, namely, Zoloft, Paxil, Wellbutrin, and Celexa.

3. The American love affair with pills

4. Washing your blues away with Prozac

5. Consumers need to be better educated about the questionable promises made by the marketers of antidepressants.

6. After the attacks of September 11, national sales for the top-selling antidepressants rose 20 percent.

EXERCISE 1

F

TH

F

F

T

F

T

TH

TH

T

EXERCISE 2

T

F

T

T

TH

F

PART 5 STRUCTURING THE COLLEGE ESSAY500

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7. Advertisements for antidepressants after September 11 featured American ﬂ ags, candles, and ﬁ reﬁ ghters.

8. A culture seeking self-stimulation and self-sedation

9. In recent years we have seen an unfortunate blurring between real and imagined medical need.

10. Americans should understand the difference between normal anxiety and pathological anxiety.

Recognizing a Thesis Statement Identify each of the following as a title (T), a thesis (TH), or a fact (F). 1. The personal interview is the most important step in the employment process.

2. Looking for a job

3. Sixty percent of all jobs are obtained through newspaper advertisements.

4. The best time to begin a foreign language is in grade school.

5. The importance of learning a foreign language

6. In the 1970s, the number of students studying foreign languages declined dramatically.

7. Most Americans doing business with Japan do not know a word of Japanese.

8. Working and studying at the same time

9. Many students in community colleges have part-time jobs while they are going to school.

10. Working a part-time job while going to school puts an enormous strain on a person.

CREATING AN EFFECTIVE THESIS STATEMENT NARROWING THE SCOPE OF THE TOPIC Student writing suffers when the chosen topic is too general. A good writer must recognize when the topic needs to be narrowed or qualifi ed so that the material will fi t the length of an essay (which is often only a few paragraphs long) and also fi t the writer’s knowledge and experience. Consider the following example: General topic: Swimming

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A writer decides to write something about swimming, but the topic swimming seems too general for an interesting essay, so the writer thinks about how to limit or qualify that topic.

To limit the topic, the writer chooses a different term that covers a smaller part of the topic and thus narrows the scope. Limited topic: Floating

To qualify the topic, the writer adds a descriptive word or phrase to the general topic. This change will also result in narrowing the scope of the topic. Qualiﬁ ed topic: Swimming two hours a week

Building the Thesis Statement: Limiting or Qualifying a Topic Below are four topics. For each one, show how a writer could narrow the scope by either limiting the topic or qualifying the topic. An example is done for you. General topic: Dentistry Limited topic: Orthodontics (changes the general term to a more narrowed focus) Qualiﬁ ed topic: Preventive dentistry (adds a descriptive word that narrows the focus)